



11TH ANNUAL BOATING & BEACH BASH FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO DRIVE TOURISM DOLLARS FOR SPRING BREAK

Nation's largest, FREE, one-day event for people with disabilities both seen and unseen returns to Boca Raton on March 10; 5,000 + guests anticipated

BOCA RATON, Fla. – January 20, 2019 – The 11th Annual Boating & Beach Bash for People with Disabilities – the nation's largest, free, one-day event for people with disabilities, both seen and unseen – is fast becoming one of South Florida's biggest tourism drivers for Spring Break.

According to event organizers, close to 6,000 guests streamed into Spanish River Park in Boca Raton last year for an event unlike any other in the nation. Since the Bash is specially designed to showcase, accommodate and celebrate people with disabilities, it welcomed families and caregivers from as far away as California and as nearby as Delray Beach.

Bash Executive Director Jay Van Vechten anticipates that each visiting family spends about \$500-\$750 in hotel stays, food, shopping, gasoline and accompanying recreational activities during their trip to attend the Bash.

“We safely estimate that approximately \$500,000 in tourism-related revenue is generated, in relation to our Bash. Conservatively speaking, about one-third of the patrons are from outside of Palm Beach County, simply because no other festival of this size, focused on an audience with disabilities exists anywhere else in the nation,” Van Vechten said. “If only 1,800 of our visitors spent a minimum of \$250 each on food, hotels and accommodations, our Bash is bringing almost a half a million dollars into the county each year. And we keep growing.”

The Bash's committee conducted an audience survey in 2016 and found that families from California, Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, the Carolinas and New York were among the crowds. Since the Bash also welcomes those with unseen disabilities, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, autism and genetic and chronic disorders, it is drawing wounded warriors, disabled veterans and post-recovery patients as well.

Designed as a Spring Break vacation for all people with disabilities, their family members and supportive caregivers, the Bash is the only event of its kind, offering complimentary, scheduled boat rides, special access to the beach and ocean with Mobi Mats, a Kids Fun Zone, wheelchair yoga, music, costumed dance parties, therapy ponies and dogs, a BBQ lunch, and more. Everything is free and geared toward the guests' special needs.

Moving forward, the Bash Planning Committee plans to market the event as a tourism-driver and collaborate more closely with state and regional tourism boards to reach more families seeking a destination event for those with special needs.

ABOUT THE BOATING & BEACH BASH FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

The Bash was started in 2009 as an event hosted by the City of Boca Raton Disability Advisory Board. The City relinquished the Bash in 2011 to the management of Executive Director Jay Van Vechten and his wife, Lowell. Since then, through community support and donations, the couple and the Bash's Planning Committee have pushed the event's growth beyond anyone's wildest expectations. Welcoming nearly 6,000 guests in 2018, the Bash has become the largest, free, wholly disability-friendly event in the country with a full schedule of entertainment, recreation, boat rides, beach access, vendors, exhibitions, workshops and food. It has also become a Spring Break destination event in South Florida, drawing families from as far away as California and New York. Learn more at www.boatingbeachbash.com

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